Project Tableau

A reunion with schoolmates from the past
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Introduction

Since video is the natural language of today's teenagers, Centropa would like to combine students' talent for making videos with their keen desire to compete, along with our desire to help them learn. The result can be a project they will be very proud of. This guide can be followed by students and teachers alike.

There are many video projects students in European schools can make, and we would like to see schools throughout Europe create 10 minute videos on a class that graduated a long time ago at your school. The films should be of very high quality. They should be historically accurate, and tell us an interesting story about your school and your city or country's history. Most of all, these stories should be innovative and creative.

All the stories need to be told in English—by the students—and this group project can involve many students participating in a range of activities:

> -- research
> -- scanning photos and working with Photoshop to make them look better
> --scriptwriting
> -- narration, and/or playing background music for the film

The film should be comprised only of old photos, with your voiceover in the soundtrack, or you can make use of video to show us the synagogues and cemeteries. Or you can use both.

Project Tableau

It is a Austro-Hungarian tradition for schools to take group photographs of graduating classes, and post them in shops around town and throughout the school for everyone to take pride in. If your school have tableaux or a yearbook of a class that graduated from your school a few generations earlier, you may have a great project at hand. In this project, your students will choose one tableau to research by finding the people in the class, contacting and interviewing them, and making a film based on what you have found. The focus of the questions is up to you. In this way you can build **a bridge between two generations** that have the natural link of having gone to the same school.

The project itself is a truly **interdisciplinary** one. The main subject areas it touches include History, Computer Studies, Jewish Studies, Media Studies, Psychology and English Language. It aims to

increase students' competencies on the fields of research, interviewing, presentation, cooperation/teamwork, critical thinking, debating, presenting, ICT (info-communication technology) systems, communication and translation. The main objective, however, is to sensitize students to the lives of those who were living the same life, though under completely different circumstances generations before. You can build a bridge between two generations that have the natural link of attending the same school.

Through Centropa you can also make it **a border-jumping experience** by sharing your film with other students the world over.

Here is a way to do it:

You don't have to follow these guidelines step by step, but it may help you to get the basic idea and you can customise the whole thing to suit your class. Below each step in blue I show you the way we did it at the Scheiber Sándor School, in Budapest, and also here is a link to a Prezi that may be of some help to see the whole picture:

http://prezi.com/x4f1yywd3ui3/?utm_campaign=share&utm_medium=copy&rc=ex0share.

Step One - Find a tableau and plan the project

In Hungary it is fairly easy as all schools have loads of tableaux hanging on the walls. But most probably every school has something similar, a yearbook for example, or a list of the alumni at the very least. If your school is not old enough to find a class that graduated many generations before your class, you may want to dig in the archives for the school in your area that used to educate the Jewish youth when there was a larger Jewish community in your home town. Of course, it is more interesting for your students to investigate their own school's history, but the other option may be more rewarding research-wise. Students need to make a detailed project plan, including how they will share the different tasks, and how they will handle the possible obstacles on the way.

Last year we decided to investigate a class that graduated in 1942/43. It was al all-girls class with 47 students, now 88 years old. I wanted them to make a Prezi based on the plans they had made so that they could become familiar with the online interface and learn something they may not have in IT classes. We set up a Facebook group for easy sharing.

Step Two – Research

If your school has an archive you will probably find the former students' personal data in the books. If not, the researching phase may turn out to be more difficult, but once you have the names and the birthdays of the students, you have something to start with. Make a list of the data you have found

(names, mother's maiden names, dates of birth, addresses) so that you can share it with the students who take part in the investigation. A Facebook group might be a handy tool for sharing and allowing the info to flow.

We have an archive which holds the books and registers going back to the 1920s. The students enjoyed it immensely because they didn't even know that there was an archive and they had never done anything like this before. We created a spreadsheet with all the data.
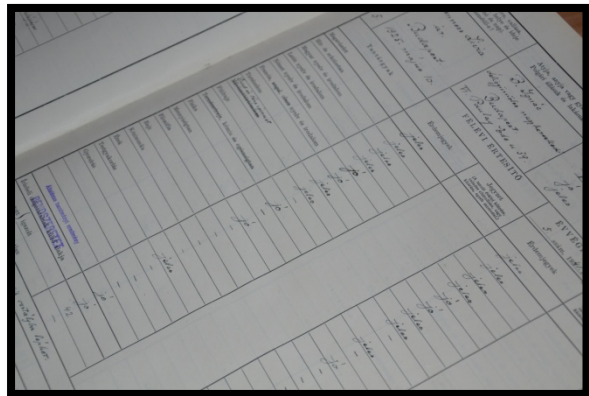
Step Three – Investigation

Finding the former students is the most difficult task of the entire project. The internet may help some but 88-year-old women are rarely on Facebook. If the school has a database with the contact

details of its alumni, it may help a lot, because if you find one person he or she may have information about the others. Inquiring at the National Registry is a last resort for finding the present addresses of those still alive.

Note: this stage is very unpredictable, so teachers have two options: either do some research in advance to make sure the students don't find themselves at a dead end, or take the risk of not being able to find anyone and have a rescue plan up your sleeve (another class perhaps). In the latter case you will have to repeat step two.

We were very lucky to have someone in the class whose mother turned out to work at the National Registry and was willing to run all the data we collected through the database. Out of the 47 students we found six still alive and living in Budapest along with their current addresses and landline phone numbers.

Step Four – Making the calls

The next step is contacting the people and asking them if they are willing to be interviewed by the students, or persuading them if they seem to be unwilling. It sounds a lot easier than it actually is. One piece of advice: prepare a few written lines of introduction that would ensure that your future interviewees understand who you are and what you want rather than putting down the phone straight away. Some rehearsal will probably be necessary. Students should also try to set up an interview with an exact place and time or, should the call be inconvenient, a time for a second call. If you don't have the contact details of all the former students they might also want to find out if the student they talk to has any info about his former classmates. It is also possible that some of them are only available via e-mail, regular mail or in person, so the contacting phase may also require some time.

We were lucky to have a set of phone numbers and my students were as excited about dialling them as if it was their first date. Two of the ladies were in too bad physical condition for an interview and only one of the ladies needed longer persuasion and a second call. Before calling, the students paired up and decided to conduct the interviews in pairs and also "divided" the ladies among them. We ended up with three interview dates, as one lady only wanted to meet together with one of her classmates. We also learned that there were other former students still alive in Israel and Canada.

Step Five - Preparing for the Interviews

At this point (if you hadn't done it during the preparation phase) your students need to decide what kind of a video they would like to make. Basically, there are two options:

a) a film of still images with voiceover (much like Centropa's films), or
b) recorded video footage with subtitles in English.

You also need to decide what the film should be about, and what you would like your interviewees to talk about, how deep you want to go and how many times your students will meet them.

a) you can conduct a controlled interview with the same set of questions asked of everyone;
b) you can conduct a semi-controlled interview, still with a set of questions but willing to let the students talk about wherever their mind may wander;
c) or, alternatively, you may want to make deep interviews in which your interviewees are free to talk about whatever they like (this requires many sessions and a lot of time).

And there is still the question of how to do it. Students need to prepare for the interviews thoroughly in terms of how to behave, what to wear, what to bring, what to ask, and what not to, etc. If you have a Centropa expert (a person who has experience making deep interviews with Holocaust survivors) you might want to invite him or her to help with the preparation.

By the end of this phase (if you chose method a or b) you should have a set of questions you want your interviewees to answer.

We invited a Centropa expert who helped us make the decisions. We decided to make our film about the school back in their time, but by making semi-controlled interviews, the students were ready to let the ladies talk. They planned for one or two visits, agreed to dress up nicely, and bring a bunch of flowers and a box of chocolates. Our Centropa expert suggested that we only record the sound because Hungarian ladies tend to focus too much on how they look instead of what they say when they are on camera. So we decided to make a Centropa-like film with still images and voiceover.

Step Six – Interviewing

Whichever method they choose, students should carefully record the interviews with suitable digital equipment. Make notes of any new turn of events, a classmate you hadn't known of, new contacts, any pictures or relics they may have. This phase is entirely done in the students' free time and ideally also organised by them. The interviews are mutually beneficial, both students and interviewees enjoy them. Regardless of the video this is the part students gain the most from. After the interviews, allow ample time for multiple feedback sessions so that they can share the experience.

The interviews were a great success for both the ladies and the students, they seemed to have enjoyed it immensely, collected pictures, stories, memories, and a personal history. They simply couldn't stop talking about it. The recordings, however, were at some points almost undecipherable (especially when they had forgotten about the recording equipment and placed it under a stack of paper).

Step Seven – Writing the Script

Once you have the recorded material it's time to start working on the film. Based on what they have collected, the students decide what they want to include in the film and make a storyboard (if there

is footage) or a script. This is a lengthy process, especially if you have a lot of recorded material. It also requires a good deal of cooperation and workload management. Some students type the interviews, some translate, others write the script/storyboard or edit the recordings.

Note: More often than not less is more here. Make a movie that can be watched and have your audience in mind. The film should not be longer than 10 minutes. It may require sacrificing some of the pedagogical benefit. Consider an "Editor's cut" (a version for yourselves).

We had previously decided to make a film of still images and voiceover, so in order to be able to write the script we had to type, translate, and edit the interviews. The typing job was done by students who were present at the interviews as they had the chance to remember what was said when the quality of the recording was too poor to decode. In the script, we organised the material based on the questions we had asked. We had decided that the film should be about the school so two of the students did the research and we included their findings in the script.

Step Eight – Making the film

If you use video footage all you need is a video editor (for beginners, Windows MovieMaker or iMovie – but some of your students are likely to have necessary skills to use more professional software). You add the previously edited bits and pieces, put them in the order of your choice, add the necessary effects, titles, credits and – if the recorded material is not in English – create subtitles.

If, however, you use still images and voiceover, you do the whole thing the other way around. First you record the voiceover, add it to the project area of the video editor and then add the images you want to illustrate your script with. Collecting, editing, and enhancing illustrations based on the script can be done by students who do not take part in the editing of the film. For the recording, use the most professional equipment you can get your hands on, and do it in a soundproof environment.

You may want to use background music, too. If possible, use non-copyrighted material so you can upload your video to YouTube (and, as Ed put it, refrain from using any tunes from *Schindler's List*).

You may also want to give a catchy title to the movie and work on the credits (students like to see their names at the end of a film, so make sure everybody is listed).

For some basic tips, consider the following steps, regardless of your choice of software

1. Collecting
    a. Collect your materials and place them into a single folder
        i. Images
        ii. Video Clips
        iii. Audio Files
        iv. Sound Effects
2. Importing
    a. Open your software and make sure you have access to "import" the materials you collected into your software.
    b. Import all materials so that you can arrange them into an organized film.

3. Arrangement
    a. Your software will have a "timeline" or "project area" where you can arrange your materials to create your film.
    b. Consider performing your narration first, at the speed and tone you wish, and then

add the materials.

    c. Once narration is complete, add your images, audio files, video clips and sound effects.

    **Remember to save frequently during this process!

4. Converting
   a. Finalize your film into a .MOV or a .MP4
   b. Save the finalized version to your computer
   c. Use the saved file to share online

Students and teachers alike can consult the tutorials for video-making on Centropa's website: http://www.centropa.org/teaching-materials/video-tutorial-how-make-movie.

At the end of the film, students should list all of the names of the former students who participated, and thank the city library, Jewish community—or whoever helped them with their research.

The final step is to upload the film, and we can review those instructions with you. Your clever students will know how to upload to blip or Youtube.

For us this part of the project proved to be the most tedious one. Once we had the recording of the voiceover it turned out to be too long but by that time it was very difficult to leave anything out. We knew we had to and even then we were at around 15 minutes. Finding illustrations also required a lot of creativity as we quickly ran out of the old photos we collected during the research phase. We used the internet a lot. Due to the background music we couldn't upload the video to YouTube, so sharing proved to be difficult. Once we were done we had a screening and everyone seemed to like what we had done. We also wanted to throw a reunion party for the ladies but we couldn't fit that into the time.

Step Nine – Evaluation and feedback

If you want to do projects like this again in the future (and even if you don't) it is important to evaluate your work and get feedback from your students.

I used a questionnaire [see attached document], and we also had a feedback session where everybody could discuss how they felt. This is a summary of the students' feedback:

All of the students liked working on the project and they all felt free in terms of making their decisions. Most students also enjoyed cooperative work and they tended to think that they would remember more by learning in a project setting than from books or lectures. Most of them also felt that this setting motivated them to learn about the topic individually and they also thought that we have more or less managed to achieve what we had planned. Based on this, it seems that they found project work in general motivating, enjoyable and also efficient.

In terms of the different skills and subject areas the results are a lot more mixed. When it came to ICT systems, only those seem to have gained of the project who had already been interested in technology. During the sound and video editing sessions probably those two people took control of the computer who had basic knowledge of the editing software, or needed only a few short instructions, thus they themselves organised the work in a way that prevented (or protected) the others from learning it. The same goes for Prezi, with only two people claiming that they learned how to use it, though verbally they admitted that they liked it. Probably the situation itself was not life-

like enough to motivate them, as they were not supposed to present their plan in front of others (even though they did in the end).

As for their linguistic development apart from the word 'archives', probably the translation and the reading aloud sessions contributed to the 3.6 average, though I had actually anticipated a much lower grade, because especially towards the end in the tense atmosphere of editing the film the language of communication was more often than not Hungarian.

On the other hand I was very happy, that they seem to have learned a lot about both Jewish history and the history of the school. They rated researching for 4.3, which I also considered a success.

From the answers they gave to the open questions (16-17) the most enjoyable part of the project that 6 of the 8 students mentioned turned out to be interviewing (the two exceptions did not take part in any of the interviews). In addition to the personal meetings three of them listed researching as well. It is noteworthy that both stages they enjoyed took place towards the beginning of the project, when they seemed to have been more enthusiastic and motivated. Only two of them listed negative experiences and both mentioned the cumbersome editing process in the end.

As it was apparent from the verbal feedback and previous complaints the thing 6 of the 8 students would do differently next time was not letting it drag for so long. I could definitely identify with their standpoint, though, as we discussed it during the verbal feedback, it is basically a system failure, inasmuch as we had to squeeze the project into 45 or 90-minute lessons, which actually goes against the guidelines of the method.

During the verbal feedback I wanted the ones who did not take part in the entire project to tell how they felt, and they said that having watched the film, they are very sorry that they could not get more involved. Though the film is very far from flawless, which they also admitted, it took tremendous work, so it was impossible not to like it. I did not even ask questions about what we could have done differently about it. There were moments towards the end, when I was afraid that they would give up on the whole thing, so I am really happy with the outcome we ended up with.

Also I didn't want to include the main question, i.e. whether meeting survivors who attended the same school as they do, changed their perspective in any ways, in the questionnaire, because I thought they may say more than they would write. The fact that almost all of them mentioned the interviews as the most positive aspect of the project suggested that it probably had some kind of an effect on them. In fact what they said was enough proof for me that even if we had failed achieving all other objectives, it would have been worth doing the project for this one. It was a longer and very touching discussion of which I would like to quote the main ideas: (1) No matter what film they watch or what book they read about the war and the Holocaust, it cannot get any more personal than this, and (2) it's completely different to learn from a history book or even to see pictures or video footage about Jews being shot at the bank of the Danube than hearing someone in person telling about her best friend being shot, or about people using her diaries as toilet paper. Others repeated what they had said at the lesson after the first interview: (3) they found it incredible listening to these ladies telling the most terrible things as if they were talking about what happened yesterday at the shop round the corner. So I assume, the answer is yes, it indeed changed their perspective, and in a way it did give history a face, one that they are unlikely to forget.